

12 October 1979

To: /OPA

STAT

Subject: "Analyzing the Potential for Political Instability  
in Developing Countries" in International Issues  
Review (28 September 1979)

I read this essay with great interest and wish to respond to your request for comment.

1. The essay represents a sophisticated integration of current social science knowledge on the subject. It is a good start.

2. Societal stability depends as much on the ability of authorities to oppose change as on their ability to affect it. The essay seems to me slanted in this respect. It emphasizes the latter and, though acknowledging the former, pays relatively little attention to it. Surely in the past, authorities have been able for long periods of time to maintain a high degree of stability by resisting or slowing down change by means of suppression, persuasion, cooptation, compromise, etc. (e.g., Great Britain during the second half of the 19th century, Bismarck's Germany). Authority resources for doing this are therefore important. This part of the problem is underdeveloped in the essay.

3. The paper operates at a very high level of generality. This is a useful first step. But it is important to descend quickly to lower levels even though, and especially because, the analytical task then becomes messier but also approaches realities more closely. For example, it is interesting to ask regarding each generalization: how many exceptions are observable historically, and how long have they endured? For example: where have striking disparities between authority patterns in government and other social structures been compatible with stability (e.g., Britain before World War I or even World War II)?

4. The real problem--and one that may or may not be capable of solution--is how to make the conceptual framework and propositions operational for intelligence purposes where the objective is not to develop generalizations but to make findings about particular societies. Note, for example, the daunting difficulty of applying propositions that refer not to dichotomous things but matters of more or less. Or note the problem of discovering usable indicators.

5. I suggest that you consider two exercises. One would apply any operational scheme--still to be developed I assume--to a few particular past cases although to do this honestly would be hard because we know the results (in terms of stability or instability). The other is to pick a few current cases where the answer is unknown and see how you do over a number of years (e.g., India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Nigeria, Ghana--there are lots of appealing cases--Iran now would be fascinating).



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